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Sheer Hard Work

Ms. Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi lady from Pakistan, is at present teaching at the University of Houston, Texas, in America. Her novels, written in English, are published by international publishing concerns.

The amazing thing is that Bapsi Sidhwa had no formal education. A polio victim at an early age, she was removed by her parents from the primary school she was attending in Lahore. For some time, she studied with the help of a tutor, but this was only for a very short period.

It was only her keenness, which spurred her on to become proficient in her studies. She started to study books in English on her own, becoming, as she put it herself, a voracious reader. Ultimately, by dint of continuous effort, she was able to write in English. She submitted her work to various magazines, but got no response from them except rejection slips. The manuscript of her first book lay on her bookshelf for eight long years. She was reduced to a state of despair.

Finally, events took a turn for the better and her articles started to be welcomed by foreign magazines. Despite having no formal degree, she has become known at the international level as a writer in English, and teaches the subject of creative writing at an American University (*Times of India*, February 25, 1990).

All learning is acquired in the school of hard work; all progress is achieved at the price of unflagging effort. Perseverance is a virtue, which can be practised at all, times, even by one who is crippled by a disease, and even by one who had failed to get a degree from a university. Hard work, in fact, is the brightest jewel in the crown of human virtues.

Success Out of Failure.

The Prophet Joseph was thrown into a deserted, dried-up well by his enemies. This, apparently, was a disaster. But the Qur'an says that no sooner had he been cast down into this dark pit than God revealed to him that he would emerge from it to a new life, and that he would soon reach such heights that even his own brothers would fail to recognize him. It was as if, instead of judging Joseph's predicament from the outside, God saw its inner reality. Viewed from such a standpoint its whole complexion changed. That is why God revealed to Joseph at that crucial point in time the fact that his worst moments were about to become his best moments. Where antagonists had intended to put a sudden end to his life's history, a whole fresh chapter was about to unfold.

There is a hadith which says, "Beware of the believer's wisdom, for he sees things by the light of God." Seeing things "by the light of God" is tellingly illustrated by God's prediction about the future course of Joseph's life. It means looking not at things, but into things in order to find their hidden potential. Looked at from this angle, what at first appears to be the worst of fates soon takes on the aspect of a stepping stone to better things. One who sees things by the light of God can see advantage in disadvantage, bright prospects in murky situations. He can then plan for the future, with a greater guarantee that he will be able to surmount all obstacles in his path. The strength of this planning is such that it cannot be thwarted by those who, failing to see the reality, judge only by appearances.

In present times, Muslims have suffered, and are still suffering on many counts at the hands of other nations. This is undoubtedly a deplorable state of affairs. But if we look at this issue only on the surface, we shall have no option but to regard certain nations as oppressors and then waste a great deal of precious time in repeatedly registering protest against them. Sadly, most Muslims today are perpetually engaged in such activities; they have yet to see their own situation by the light of God. Had they ever perceived it in this way, they would have known that every cloud has a silver lining. They would have known that what appears to be the worst dilemma can bear the best of fruits.

Here, I should like to refer to an aspect of human history, which has been particularly emphasized by Arnold Toynbee in his well-known book, *The Study of History*. In this Toynbee has examined in depth twenty one civilizations of the old and new worlds. What has struck him as truly remarkable is that the creators of the great civilizations were mostly those nations which had suffered some major defeat, or which had had to face conditions of great adversity. This unexpected assessment would clearly indicate that favourable developments are born from the wounds inflicted by unpropitious circumstances. Indeed, the modern civilization produced by the western countries provides a clear example in support of Toynbee's theory.

Before the rise of the western nations, Muslims ruled over a large part of the globe. They had even conquered Syria and Palestine, which were holy places for the Christians. In order to recover them the Christian nations launched a united assault on the Muslim world. These wars are known in history as the Crusades and were waged intermittently for almost two hundred years from 1095 to 1271. But finally the western nations had a humiliating defeat inflicted on them by the Muslims, after which they lost their military aspirations. With no further hope of challenging the Muslims on the battlefield, they began to aspire to better things in other spheres. This situation was marked by a new way of thinking which came to be called the spiritual Crusades. That is to say that they were now facing up to their opponents in non-military fields.

They set about learning Muslim sciences, and academic books began to be translated from Arabic into English. After the first stages of imbibing Muslim learning, they began to add to this body of knowledge, and persisted in their efforts for several hundred years to the point where human history entered into a new era: the traditional age was now replaced by the scientific age; handicrafts now gave way to the machine. From the wounds of a crushing defeat, modern civilization had begun its ever-accelerating evolution, leading its creators to eventual world dominance.

The tremendous success of the western nations emerged from an abysmal failure. It was the defeats they had suffered in crusades, which led them to the victories of the modern age.

In this world of God, defeat is also the door to victory. The secret of success lies hidden in failure. It is for us to realize this and to avail of it.

Religion and Politics

With the independence of India in 1947, two countries – India and Pakistan – came into existence on the subcontinent. In both these countries there was a secular group and a religious group. The secular group held that the system of the country's governance should be run along purely secular lines, independently of religion, whereas the thinking of the religious group was quite the contrary. They insisted that the political system of the country should be governed in accordance with the dictates of religion.

This religion-based system was called Nizam-e-Mustafa in Pakistan, and Ram Rajya in India. Although in both of these countries political power fell into the hands of the secular group, in neither country did the religious group remain silent. Rather, they pursued the path of confrontation in order to attain their goal of establishing the system of government on the basis of religion. To put it another way, they opted for the path of force in order to replace the secular system with the system of government of their choice.

This struggle culminated in Pakistan in April 1979 with Bhutto's execution, which was termed judicial murder by Bhutto himself. Pakistan's religious class felt that Bhutto's existence presented the greatest obstacle to introducing Nizam-e-Mustafa. He had, therefore, to be eliminated. But the experiment revealed that Nizam-e-Mustafa could not find a place in the life of the nation even after the removal of Bhutto. The hold of the secular group persisted.

The Ram Rajya movement in India culminated in December 1992 with the demolition of the Babari Masjid at Ayodhya. Even after a period of two years, subsequent to the demolition, the Ram Rajya movement has not been able to move even one step ahead. The secular group continues to dominate the political arena.

Whether it be right or wrong, from the ideological point of view, to subordinate politics to religion, the experiment of the last fifty years tells us that our present *course* is certainly not the right one. It would be more true to say that the present course, in terms of non-achievement of goals, has been counter-productive. What has come into being, and what is going to be achieved in the effort to consolidate the position of religion is in no way a religious system, but is rather a course of destruction. This destructive element has only added to the general ruination of the country.

How did all these efforts on our part backfire? It can be traced quite simply to our violation of realities. Innumerable natural causes have to cooperate in this world in order to bring about a significant event. Someone has said very pertinently: 'Politics is the art of the possible.' That is, only when conducive factors are present is a leader able to realise a political event. It is not possible even for the greatest of leaders to bring about a political revolution simply by dint of his own efforts without the cooperation of external elements.

The Islamization of Pakistan and the Hinduization of India simply failed to take shape; despite a 50-year bloody struggle neither could Pakistan be Islamized nor India Hinduized.

As a result of the intellectual development of the last several hundred years, the world mindset is now entirely against a state based on religion. This world-wide intellectual revolution is known as secularism. While religion is founded on *faith*, secularism is based on *reason*. The majority of the educated classes in modern times has accepted that matters of state should be kept independent of sacred scriptures, and that they should be dealt with on the basis of *reason*. That is to say that world opinion is in favour of the secular rather than the religious state.

India presents no exception to this rule. As a result of the modernization of education over the last two hundred years, the new Indian generation thinks along the same lines as the rest of the world. Like all other countries, India too is a part of the global village.

Given this reality, if a state based on religion had to be established, a sea change in world thinking – on a purely ideological plane – should have to be effected. Without a universal, intellectual revolution, it would be impossible to found a religious state in the manner of a political island even at the level of one's own country.

The only practicable course to follow in this matter is to acknowledge the reality. Besides this, there is almost no other choice. Now the time has come for a true patriot ultimately to change himself in the interests of his country. Accepting his limitations, he should mould himself in accordance with the reality rather than waste time in pursuing the unattainable goal of a reality moulded to suit his own purposes.

Having given due consideration to all aspects of this issue, I have come to the conclusion that without going into the ideological discussion of what is right and what is wrong, all the concerned parties should come to agree in this matter on a practicable formula in the wider interests of the country.

What is most important in this connection is to set the election process in motion without any hindrance. Elections should be free and fair. Whichever group is subsequently elected to power should be given full freedom to complete its term.

During this period, the defeated group should never launch a campaign to oust the victor group. It should, on the contrary, direct its efforts to impressing its ideology upon the public, which is later to vote it to power. The five-year period should be devoted to bringing about changes in public opinion by peaceful methods. If the defeated group succeeds in influencing the voters, it will automatically be voted to power in the next elections. It will then find the opportunity to reconstruct the country's political and administrative systems along its own ideological lines.

Wholehearted acceptance of election results, followed by the adoption of a waiting policy, while one's own ideology continues to be propagated in a peaceful manner, is the only practicable course. This is the only way to influence the minds of the voters, without running counter to the genuine interests of the country.

Sure Guarantee

The greatest and surest guarantee for the protection of the believers in this world, according to the Qur'an, lies in their adherence to the path of patience and piety. The Qur'an has made this quite clear at various places. On one occasion, while referring to the ill-wishers and enemies of Islam, the Qur'an speaks in absolute and conclusive terms:

If you persevere and guard yourselves against evil,
their machinations will never harm you (30: 120).

There is nothing mysterious about the point made in this verse. This is a simple and natural truth, which is illustrated by everyday events.

If you stand by truth and justice no adversary will be able to oppose you without it against his nature and his conscience. The voice of his own conscience will speak out against such opposition or enmity precisely because it is directed against a truthful person. An antagonist will indulge in negative activities against you only so long as haughtiness and willfulness prevail upon his conscience, thus producing in him an abnormal state of mind. The moment his thinking returns to normal, he will lose the courage to act against you.

Adherence to the path of patience (restraint in the face of other's injustice) and piety (humility and modesty before God's greatness) is the best way to bring an antagonist back to a reasonable frame of mind.

The possession of these two cardinal virtues is the surest guarantee of keeping one's rivals cool. When faced with this superior code of ethics, they will soon lose their arrogance and feelings of enmity, and will return to a normal state of mind. It is this return to normalcy which makes it possible for a man's own nature to provide effective checks to the perpetration of injustice. Once this correct psychology has been established, there is no further need for the police or the army to enforce the laws.

Prayer is Action

According to Ibn Ishaq, a man by the name of Tufail bin Amr Ad Daus of the Daus tribe once visited the Prophet when he was living in Mecca. When the Prophet recited the Qur'an to him, he was so impressed by it that he accepted Islam. Later, with the Prophet's permission, he went back to his tribesmen to call them to Islam. But his people spurned his message and refused to accept it. Tufail now came back to tell the Prophet to curse them. Instead, the Prophet raised his hands and started praying for them. "O God, guide the Daus tribesmen. O, God, guide the Daus people."

Then he told Tufail to return to his friends and once again call them to the Truth. He also enjoined him to be gentle with them (Seerat Ibn Hisham, 1/409).

The prayer and the advice given by the Prophet were not simple matters. They were aimed at correcting the negative attitude developing in Tufail into a positive approach. The disgust he felt for his people was then converted into a feeling of well-wishing. Whereas Tufail had only been able to see matters in the light of past events, he was now guided by the Prophet to look to the future.

Prayer means not just asking God for something but putting oneself in the correct frame of mind. It is a kind of conditioning towards sound psychology and right thinking. But, most important of all, the act of praying awakens within oneself the divine power. When Tufail returned to his tribe with his new way of thinking, he had acquired a new edge to his personality. He was now better equipped to present the truth to the people in a more effective way. It was inevitable that the whole tribe should respect to his call and embrace Islam.

In a society where feelings of goodwill have become so prevalent that people begin to pray for each other, the natural result is the development of positive psychology throughout the entire social fabric. Without this no society can truly better itself

Life and Death

Death is not the end of everything. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a new life. It is nevertheless the most serious moment in one's lifespan, for it is the day when one embarks on a new stage in the totality of one's existence.

On the day of his death, a man leaves behind him a phase which is only temporary in order to enter upon the eternal state of being. Having completed his period of earthly action, he now commences his period of heavenly reward. Before death, he lived in a world where realities lay hidden; after death he will find himself in a world where realities are as bright as the sun and the moon. The test man has to undergo during his lifetime is of his ability to discover the hidden reality; after death, he will see reality with the utmost clarity.

In the life before death, he is put to the test of believing in realities as yet unseen; of surrendering to the truth without any external compulsion. He must follow God's guidance, even if, in default, no material interest of his would be thereby affected. This state of affairs makes the present life a very serious matter, for one who fails in the trials of today, incurs the danger of eternal failure.

If, while still in possession of his eyes, his heart and his mind, a man still fails to recognize the truth, he will find himself deaf and blind the moment he enters upon the world of eternity. When the truth appears before a man, and he still fails to acknowledge it as such, he will be doomed to dumbness and insignificance, and there will be no way to extricate himself from that plight. One who has used his tongue and his pen to distance others from the truth will find himself thrust far away from God's vicinity in the world of the hereafter. He will never be blessed with the sight of his Lord.

Death, it should be remembered, is the name for the greatest transition from the present to the eternal.

Two Categories

Paradise is the ultimate abode of the pious servants of God. As the Qur'an tells us, the inhabitants of Paradise will fall into two broad categories: the specially exalted class of good people, who are nearest to God *muqarrabun* (56:11-26) and righteous people in general, who are called Companions of the Right Hand. Magnificent rewards are reserved for the first group ... the Foremost in faith, while rewards of a general nature are reserved for the other group.

What will be the basis of the difference between the two categories? The Qur'an tells us that those who gave of their wealth before the Prophet's victory and who took part in the fighting are of a higher standing than others who did not. Their degree is greater (57:10). The difference does not relate just to the period in which they lived, but to the nature of their faith. This is what will determine the final categorization.

The truth stands by itself, in abstract form, at the very outset. It is like an ideology, which is supported solely by the force of logic. Later when truth enters into the phase of victory and influence, it no longer assumes the shape of a mere intellectual exercise, but rather becomes a tangible reality, visible to one and all.

In the initial stages, truth is recognizable only through verbal argument, whereas, in the later stages, concrete evidence is there to support it. In the first phase, as soon as a man accepts the truth, he becomes a stranger among his own people. One who accepts it in a later phase immediately becomes respected and popular. In the first phase a man stands to lose, whereas in the second, he is the gainer. In the first phase one is likely to sink into oblivion, whereas in the second, one scales the heights. It is the difference made by the kind of sacrifices one has made, which decides whether one is to be placed in the first or in the second category.

Collision Course

On October 26, 1992, as an Indian Airlines Boeing 737, Flight number IC 467, approached the Goa airfield, its commander asked the ATC (Air Traffic Controller) for permission to land. He was asked by the ATC to delay landing, and to maintain his altitude at 3,000 feet to allow an Indian Navy aircraft to take off. The Indian Airlines pilot complied with these instructions and was manoeuvring at that height to initiate his approach when he spotted 'a Navy aircraft call sign 303, less than half a nautical mile away and very obviously on a collision course. The IA- Commander promptly reduced speed and dived 300 feet to avoid a catastrophe. This split second decision saved the situation.

This incident may appear to relate solely to the world of aviation, but it has a great lesson for the everyday world. The human journey through life is also made on exactly the same principle as was followed by the quick-thinking pilot. Two aeroplanes on a collision course were both going to be destroyed in a matter of seconds. At the crucial moment, one aeroplane dived below the other and as a result of this 'retreat,' both were saved from disaster.

This incident shows that just as advancing is necessary to succeed in life, so is retreating. In this world sometimes retreat is more desirable than forward movement. When there is fear of a head-on collision avoidance is the only solution.

Those who insist on going forward, when wisdom dictates retreat, will do little except add to the chapters of destruction in history. Their so-called advance will culminate for their nation in final and eternal retreat.

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Thoughts of an American Muslim

Three years ago David Miller embraced Islam and Became Yousaf Omar. This transition had a great deal to do with his disillusionment from his society. Here he reflects on the nature of American culture through the worldview that has transformed him.

Whenever I think about myself living in the United States these days, two stories come to mind. The first is from Maulana Rumi and the other, although a joke, is very revealing of the viewpoint that prevails here.

In the first book of the Mathnawi, Rumi tells a story of a man who lived in a desert and who, urged on by his wife, agreed to take an offering to the King in the city. The offering was a pitcher of rain water, which the man and his wife had laboriously collected. They considered this water precious because it was sweet compared to the brackish water of their well, their only major source.

Meagre though the offering was, the King received it in the spirit in which it was offered and, emptying the pitcher, filled it with gold. The King also arranged for the man to return to his home on a boat. Seeing the vastness of the river on which he travelled, the man marvelled at all the water the King had at his command and at the way he took the poor man's meagre offering and rewarded him.

It is one of Rumi's renditions of the Islamic ethos. In fact, it is so rich in implications that Rumi himself narrated it with more than the usual splendid digressions, which enrich his work. The King, Maulana makes clear, is God and His bounty is as boundless as all the water on earth.

What enchanted the story was the understanding that prevailed throughout, an understanding of an Islamic *umma*, of compassion, of knowledge of the world, of tolerance and of the recognition of the different kinds of people, which constitute the Muslim world.

I must admit, however, to one question, which continued to bother me until most recently. Was Rumi's society an ideal or did it really exist?

Then, a couple of weeks back, I read in a special travel supplement to the New York Times of an American author, Annie Dillard, giving a short description of her 'sojourn' in North Yemen. She was there during an earthquake and she described how people shared their possessions with the victims and gasoline station owners 'opened their tanks' so that the gasoline would be free and how wage earners contributed one month's wages.

A Yemeni told her of some of his people's responsibilities: 'If someone is sick, or old, or poor, well, we give our food; we get that person clothes; we build for a widow a new house if the old one is falling down.'

The remarkable thing about Dillard's description is how full of appreciation it is. Most American travellers, returning from Islamic countries, do not give positive reports of Muslims, even of those who have been hospitable to them. They were unable to see any women, these travellers complain, except those who were heavily veiled. They mention how exasperated they became because of the constant references to God and the frequent addition of Insha' Allah to statements about the future. Even writers sympathetic to Islam often reveal a bias. They describe the *tasbeih* as 'worry beads,' without any regard to what *dhikr* is and how serenity is achieved through the remembrance of Allah.

Rumi's story pre-supposes a vital aspect of the Islamic ethos, the presence of a moral understanding among all the people. The trust the wife places in the King, the treatment of her husband at the palace gates, the ready acceptance of his meagre offering, the fact that those with the King also took this acceptance in stride, the way the husband was treated in the King's city.

A world, in short, so conspicuous by its absence in this narcissistic country called, the United States. There is a moral aridity here which parches the throat and lips and which also parches the soul. It is best summed up in a joke.

There was a rich girl in a class who was assigned to write on a poor family. 'Once upon a time' she wrote, 'there was a poor family. The father was poor, the mother was poor, the children were poor, cook was poor, the maid was poor, the butler was poor and the chauffer was poor.'

The United States is that girl, unable to see beyond a very limited set of assumptions it holds dear. After all, its people insist that their country is the epitome of civilization by virtue of its abundance of wealth and weapons (their only criteria for judging whether a country is civilized).

There is something drastically lacking and that is a commonly understood sense of either morals or ethics.

The United States today is; in short an amoral world. Not immoral, which pre-supposes the existence of morals, which in turn means that the people are fully aware that they are doing wrong when they do, but amoral. A 'people' as the Qur'an puts it, 'without any awareness (of right or wrong)' (11:29).

People are killed here for the little money they possess and they are killed without the least compunction. The murderers bring to mind Lieutenant Cally who dismissed the My Lai massacre he was responsible for as 'no big deal.'

One might argue that there is a resurgence of religion here in the United States and point to the rising number of churchgoers. But figures are deceptive. Religion has become a ritual confined to the sabbath. What people do the rest of the week appears to have no connection with what is expressed in church. And yet national leaders insist on calling America a Christian country.

What people say and what people do are two completely different thing. Reagan was, some months back, described as a great Christian, despite the fact that he doesn't attend church. Ironically, while this

statement was being made, a former president, Jimmy Carter did not concern himself with labels. With his Christian service group, he came to New York, renovated an apartment complex to be used by the poor, and left without seeking any publicity.

Religion here is at best lopsided. One watches with fascination a fundamentalist Christian church service in a huge auditorium filled with impeccably dressed people listening to a group of teenagers singing a song relegating everyone else to hell – Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Marxists, Atheists. The people are all white. There is not a single black or brown face there. Equally difficult to accept is that church priests and ministers describe as ‘bums’ those without homes or food or clothes, those who sleep in the park even in sub-zero temperatures.

The lopsidedness is also illustrated by another story they tell here. A boy went up to his father after school one day and said that he did not understand what the teacher was talking about when she mentioned a ‘moral problem.’ The father thought for a while and decided to illustrate what she meant.

“You know,” he explained, “that your uncle and me own a stationary store. Well, one day a customer comes in to buy some pencils. He hands me a twenty-dollar bill and I mistake it to be a one-dollar bill and I give him the change accordingly. But the customer doesn’t notice. He’s heading for the door and I look at him and at the twenty-dollar bill and then I realize I am faced with a moral question: ‘Do I share the twenty-dollar bill with your uncle or not?’”

More often than not the Americans appear to be a people who are as the Qur’an puts it, lost in darkness (*zulmat*) after their ephemeral light has disappeared. They neither listen to those who talk sense, nor do they know what to do.

‘Whatever became of sin?’ asks William F. Buckley, Jr., who shares with the fundamentalists much of the conservative ideology, in a recent issue of The New York Times Magazine. It is, not surprising, precisely the question Karl Meninger of the Meninger Clinic asked in his book published in 1973, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, a volume aimed at solving all kinds of social problems through ‘an ethical system for today’s world.’ The book sold more than 125,000 copies in hardcover alone and about twice as many in paperback.

The question these authors should be asking is, ‘Is anyone listening? Is anyone listening to those who remind the people of vital necessity of values to keep society together?’

The majority of Americans simply do not know that they are committing some wrong. And when the very few do, they do not know what to do about it.

A fine, recent example is a school’s attempt to cut down and eventually eliminate promiscuity. It forbade the holding of hands within the school buildings. Evidently, educators still have to learn about the youngsters they have to deal with. The students reacted with the way they usually do, by overdoing what has been forbidden. Worse, they took to the city streets in a demonstration. Many were arrested and thrown into jail.

A sorry state of affairs, in a country, which considers itself the greatest in the world.

How did all this come about? The reasons should be of special interest to Muslims all over the world, especially to those attracted to the glamour of things American.

One of the chief reasons is not far to seek. Hollywood. It is difficult to believe nowadays that at one time amorality was largely confined to cinema screen. People then had a moral ethical sense. One has only to compare crime figures to those of today. Nowadays, movies and television shows are so highly emulated that at times it is difficult to distinguish between what is happening on the screen and what is happening in real life. Show business dominates this country. Movie and television stars are worshipped. The stars consider themselves sacrosanct. When the Reagans moved into the White House, they behaved like royalty and talked of the Carters as common people.

Another important reason is one that created an enormous chasm between what happened before and what happened afterward World War Two. It was a war then, to quote Nietzsche 'everything was permissible.' It was, as everyone knows, the most brutal war ever fought.

It was during that period that compassion disappeared. Other countries might have recovered it, but not the United States. In addition, that brutality and that freedom to do anything one wanted without any restraint whatsoever did not disappear in this country with the end of the war. Both persisted and, worse, increased.

The Americans were basking in what then appeared to be a perpetual and luxurious sun. The United States had gone into the war a debtor nation and it emerged a creditor nation, with all the allies owing it millions upon millions of dollars. The war effort had also helped to enrich the country.

With affluence came an increase in the two other factors that helped sunder human relationships, the automobile and the telephone.

The automobile gave individuals a power they did not otherwise possess, a power that enabled them to do a number of things unabated. It enabled them to disappear from the scene where they had done wrong. If a person didn't like a neighbour, he or she moved, to another part of town, to another town, to another part of the country almost a continent away.

The ensuing mobility became a habit, most often in its worst aspect. More and more Americans moved away from their parents and, equally significant, away from their roots. This has become so much of an accepted part of American life that no one nowadays asks whether 'street people,' those so poverty-stricken that they have no live in the streets, have any relatives.

The telephone further exacerbated what was rapidly becoming an American way of life, fragmentation. Personal visits became a thing of the past. People talked with even the closest relatives only over the phone. This, too, became widely accepted. As a result, practically everyone overlooks the irony of a

telephone company's television commercial, which asks people to use their long distance service to 'reach out and touch someone.'

If there is one person who typifies the direction the United States was heading for as far back as World War One, it is Hemingway. His life and his books parallel the road to amorality. In the beginning of his career he profited from those days when the dollar was king and Europe was the 'playground' for Americans.

(F. Scott Fitzgerald put it sarcastically in 'Babylon Revisited': when there was snow all over Paris, "if you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money." But Fitzgerald knew what was happening to America and the dream the country was trying to realize. He very finely delineated the dissipation of that dream in his novel, *The Great Gatsby* but it was too painful and hence no one paid much attention to him.)

In Hemingway's early stories and novels, the absence of morality was clear, depicted as a consequence of the brutality of war and concomitantly expressed in brutal terms. His heroes suffered from 'moral wound,' one of them in fact having been injured in the war as to render him incapable of having any sex.

But soon, Hemingway's name became synonymous with the playground and later with hedonism and eventually with amorality. His heroes indulged in sheer pleasure – bullfighting, big game hunting, big game fishing – all of them filled with violence of one kind or another.

Hemingway eventually became the most famous writer in the history of the United States and one of a very few who made the front pages of newspapers. He was therefore widely read, thus becoming an exceptional writer in one other respect. He, too, joined the very few authors whose books were avidly read both in the public world and academia. And there is the rub.

One of the major reasons for his popularity in the university world was that his amorality – characteristic of almost all his later works – appealed to professors and students alike. Here was a world they aspired to, one without any restrictions whatsoever. As a result, without intending to, there was a tacit support for what was already taking place in society.

So that when American society achieved its peculiar kind of freedom – an amoral ethos – it did so because the upholders of the most vital part of culture sanctioned it. Without that underpinning, there might have been some hope for this country. Right now there isn't any hope and the most tragic thing about all of it is that the American people are not aware of it.

Two Methods

Aiming at Eternal Truth

There are two ways of launching a movement, one by *demands* and the other by revolution. The former, exemplified for all time by the life of the Prophet Muhammad, has regrettably had to yield pride of place to the latter which is the more favoured, not only by communists, but also by present-day Muslims. Today, it is not only those of communists' persuasions who rely on the revolutionary method, but also Muslims, who are everywhere to be found in armed encounters with their supposed rivals. Although many make their point by organising media protest campaigns, those who have access to bombs and bullets are quick to use them.

Why is it that Muslims are so enamoured of the revolutionary method, to the point of forgetting that there is such a thing as the *da'wa* method? Why should they favour the ideology of Marx and Lenin when they have the Sunnah of the Final Prophet to show them the way?

The revolutionary path is that of reaction, and just explaining it in Islamic terms does not transform it into an Islamic method. *Da'wa*, on the other hand, calls for patience and avoidance of confrontation. This method, as opposed to that of reaction, is doubtless the more difficult of the two, but, in the long run, is the best calculated to bear fruit.

The revolutionary method is negative in that it has its roots in hatred and is guided by mere human desires; it calls for instant action, and it is always the others, the non-revolutionaries, who are pelted with stones. On the contrary, the *Da'wa*, method is positive in that it grows out of love. Where revolution calls for precipitateness, *Da'wa*, advises patience, caution. Where revolutionary acts earn one popularity, *Da'wa*, leads one into self-obliteration and the readiness to be the target of others' stones.

Revolution is material in that it centres on human wants. *Da'wa*, is spiritual in that it is inspired by the Qur'an and the hadith. Revolution aims at an external target. *Da'wa*, aims at eternal truth – a wholly internal matter.

Facing the Court

Mr. Manohar J. Pherwani, a government officer, rose in service to become Chairman of the Unit Trust of India and of the National Housing Bank, both highly rated posts in economic spheres. In 1991, the Reserve Bank of India issued a circular, which stated that bank funds should not be transferred to the stock market. Disregarding this circular, Mr. Pherwani issued a cheque for Rs. 3,078.63 crores to a broker. He was later brought to book for flouting government regulations. He resigned from his post on May 9, 1992. This chain of events was reported in the *Hindustan Times* of May 22 and June 3, 1992.

His case was handed over to the C.B.I. for investigation, a development ultimately proved disastrous. He so feared being unable to exonerate himself of all blame in court, that only twelve days after resigning, he complained of severe chest pains around 2.25 A.M., and within five minutes he had collapsed. He was only 58 years of age.

The trauma of having to appear in a man-made court proved too overwhelming for Mr. Pherwani. But if he felt afraid of having to account for his actions in a court set up by human beings, how would he feel about appearing in a court set up by the Almighty? When having to face a human court proves so unnerving, what will a man's condition be when he finds himself standing trial in the divine court?

Death may spare a man from facing human judges, but it will immediately set him before his Maker, the greatest Divine Judge, which will be a much more terrifying experience. This is a matter of the utmost gravity. Were man to ponder upon it, he would be shaken to the very core.

(188:22)

The Construction of Life

Reviewing modern, scientific civilization, a commentator has made the very pertinent observation that it is not invested with ideological permanence. This seems quite true when we consider that Copernicus replaced Ptolemy, Newton replaced Copernicus, and Einstein replaced Newton.

The culture of the modern age has come to be called the 'culture of technology'. But this is a contradiction in terms. Culture, by its very nature, suggests permanence. But science and technology are sadly wanting in this quality. Ergo, any culture based on technology will always have the characteristics of impermanence. It can never meet the eternal requirements of human nature.

Technology is of material service to man. As such, it cannot be the total basis of human culture. It can certainly take us from the age of the plough to the age of the tractor or, from the bullock-cart to the aeroplane. But technology cannot give man a culture or a civilization in the real sense of those words. Technology can serve man but it cannot be expected to provide man with the spiritual mainspring of his life – a religion.

Technology, in short, is the servant of man, whereas culture is his life's religion. If technology is life's conveyance, it is culture, which determines man's destination. The changes taking place in things like conveyances do no real harm. But when the very bases of culture begin to be shuffled human life will lose its meaningfulness.

The right way is to make technology life's servant, while adopting religion as the basis of culture. Now when we find that of all religions, Islam is the only one, which has been properly preserved and established it goes without saying that the only basis for the construction of life on a foundation of culture is that of Islam. Islam provides a stable base for the construction of human life in which there is no question of change.

Gratitude

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet once said, "One who never expresses his gratitude to other human beings will never be thankful to God."

Thankfulness is a state of mind, which cannot be compartmentalised. If it manifests itself in one place, the chances are that it will do so in other places too. If a man shows gratitude to one person, he will surely show it to others likewise.

When a man does someone a good turn, it is something quite obvious – a tangible direct experience. On the contrary, God's kindness, being an indirect experience, is not at all obvious. One has to be perceptive, and reflective to be able to realise what favours are granted to man by God. While the favours a man does are observable, God's favours can be realized only by thinking about them.

One who fails to perceive an event which is directly observable cannot be expected to grasp something which can be apprehended only after a great deal of cogitation.

If the recipient of a favour fails to acknowledge it for fear of belittling himself in the eyes of his benefactor, he does himself nothing but harm. It is more a question of being belittled in the eyes of his own conscience than falling down in others' eyes – a course by far the more injurious.

An even greater disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one's fellow men leads on to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the Universe. There is no greater loss in this world than one who has failed to acknowledge his Creator.

The Importance of Time

Lord Chesterfield was born in London in 1694 and died there in 1773. His letters addressed to his son, which were later published, described the art of success. In one letter, for instance, he writes, 'I recommend you to take care of the minutes, for the hours will take care of themselves.'

That is to say that if you can save your minutes, your hours will of themselves be saved. Taking care of the parts is just as good as taking care of the whole. This is because the whole is made up of parts.

Mostly people tend to neglect the part in favour of the whole. This mentality ultimately results in failure at some later stage.

Never waste a moment of your available time. By availing of your moments you can be the possessor of your months and years. Wasting minutes will cause you to lose months if not years.

If you are wasting, daily, just five minutes of your hour, this will amount to wasting two hours in twenty four hours. This will eventually come to 60 hours in a month, and 720 hours in a year. This is how the majority of people have been wasting most of their available time. A man whose life span is eighty hardly makes full use of 40 years of his time.

Time is your greatest asset. Be meticulous about saving it. All great success ultimately boils down to an accumulation of small success. Once you are ready to achieve a small success, a big success will of itself come your way. Here is a practical example of how this apparently trivial piece of advice can have great results.

Molvi Lutfullah, born in 1802 in Dharagar (an ancient city of Malwah) was an ordinary tutor. He had not received any of his education in an English school even for a single day, yet his autobiography was published in 1857 by Smith Aldara and CO., London. It was titled: 'Autobiography of Lutfullah: A Mohammedan Gentleman.' This book included a foreword by Mr. East Week who in commending the excellence of the English written by Molvi Lutfullah, expressed his amazement at how an Indian could write such an exhaustive book in a foreign language.

How did Molvi Lutfullah come to be capable of writing a book which was not only published in London, but which was held praiseworthy for its language by the English publisher? The secret is expressed in this saying: "Little by little becomes great."

Molvi Lutfullah learnt English by his own efforts. He used to teach Hindustani, Persian and Marathi languages to the English employees of the East India Company. The number of his students is put at 100. It was this contact with the English that made him feel interested in learning the English language. He began studying English privately. By working hard continuously for eight years, he managed to have

full command over it. He has written in his book that during those eight years, not even a single night passed without having committed to memory 10 words of the English language, or without having thoroughly learnt a few pages from Dr. Gilchrist's Grammer, a 'Ten words' appear to be of no significance, but when multiplied over eight years this step can turn a man into a foreign language writer capable of claiming appreciation even from native speakers who are masters of the language.

Arguments over religious matters nullify piety

Awam ibn Hawshab advised people to avoid arguing over religious matters, otherwise their good deeds would be nullified.

(Jami' Bayan al-Ilm)

The Greatness of Humility

I once happened to meet a gentleman who had neither a proper education nor a sound economic position. His greatest asset as he saw it, was the fact that his grandfather, who lived in a palatial house, had been one of the Nawab's close associates and had had an honourable title bestowed upon him. He went on at some length, and with great pride, about his grandfather's exalted state.

I had the impression that the cause of his own destitution was his pride in his ancestry. The psychology, which went with being one of a noble line, had prevented him from either acquiring a good education or engaging himself in some profitable business. Out of sympathy for his down-at-heel condition, I tried to make him understand the importance of adopting a humble and realistic attitude, as opposed to that of continuing pride in his forefather's achievements. To support my arguments, I narrated many telling incidents, but it was all to no avail. He was beyond understanding. It was as if I were conversing with him in a totally alien language.

The same is true of present-day Muslims who draw their emotional sustenance from the religion of pride. If this is happening on an ever-expanding scale, it is because they fail to understand the religion of humility.

Islam, for the believers of the early stages, was just such a religion – a religion of humility. This psychology of humility, which marked their thoughts and deeds, was produced by their keen awareness of the greatness of God. For them God's law became a reality, for God elevates all those who adopt the posture of humility. From there, by the grace of God, they went on to emblazon their deeds and their virtues on the pages of human history for all time to come.

The Muslims of the present day are the successors of the Muslims of those early stages. It is unfortunate, however that they have inherited from them not their humility but only the recollection of the great heights to which their remote ancestors rose. Devoid of humility and its resultant virtues, they are carried through life on a flood of grandiloquence.

The need of the hour is to awaken in them the true spirit of their faith so that they may be brought closer to religion based on humility. God elevates the humble: the proud and the vain are cast by Him into oblivion.

Understanding

Once on a train journey I overheard a conversation between two gentlemen who were sitting opposite me, one a Hindu, the other a Muslim. The Hindu said, "It seems that Islam is an intolerant religion." The Muslim replied, "That is a complete misunderstanding. Islam, on the contrary, teaches tolerance." Both advanced arguments in favour of their separate viewpoints. The Hindu cited an instance of Muslims in his locality becoming provoked by the preparations being made by Hindus to take out a procession. There had been a clash and the procession was stopped. The Muslim passenger, however, simply recited verses from the Qur'an to prove his point.

It occurred to me that both of them, judging by appearances, were serious and sincere. Neither seemed biased. Then why was it that their views differed so widely? After considerable reflection, I came to the conclusion that it was traceable to the difference in their outlook. The Hindu formed his opinion of Islam by judging the behaviour of Muslims. The Muslims, on the other hand, quoted extensively from the Qur'an, presenting the content of the verses as if Muslims actually followed the code of ethics enshrined in the holy scriptures.

A more proper and more sincere approach would be to engage in thorough self-appraisal before sitting in judgement on others. Before attempting to correct other's faults, one should set about rectifying one's own. It is the gap between principle and practice that is the main reason for misunderstanding. Once this gap is eliminated, misunderstanding will of itself disappear. Moreover, if one wants to be certain of not being misunderstood, one must be ready to show restraint in the face of provocation. One must not react negatively, even if it means some initial sacrifice of one's self-esteem.

Imagine what happens if someone abuses you and you retaliate by throwing a stone at him. Later, while reporting this incident, the wrong doer will mention only the fact that you threw a stone at him. He will leave out all mention of his own bad behaviour. The misunderstanding truly created is then well-nigh impossible to set right. If you want to avoid having your behaviour misinterpreted by others, you must refrain from reacting altogether in negative situations, even if you feel that you would be completely justified in so doing. In that way, no one can make the kind of spiteful allegations against you from which misunderstandings can so quickly arise.

30 March-April 1995

God loves the humble cry of His servant

When a servant of God calls upon his Lord, and his call is pleasant to God, He orders Gabriel not to hasten the fulfillment of His servant's prayer, for He likes to hear the voice of one making supplication to Him."

(Jami'al-Ulum wa al-Hikam)

The Language of Hadith

Dr. Maurice Bucaille has brought out many books and articles on the subject of the veracity of the Qur'an. He has proved by scientific argument that the Qur'an is the Book of God.

He does not, however, place the Hadith on the same plane as the Qur'an. Expressing his doubts regarding the authenticity of the hadith, he holds that some traditions are authentic, but that others are either dubious, or should be rejected outright. (p. 243)

This comment is based on a misunderstanding. There is a hadith, for instance, which explains that the intense heat of summer is due to blasts of wind from hell. He failed to understand the meaningfulness of this hadith, because he took it quite literally. Actually, this hadith is only one of the many that are couched in symbolic language.

Let us take just one instance for illustration. It was the custom among Arabs for people of rank to follow funeral processions on horseback or camelback. When the Prophet once saw some people riding on horses alongside a cortege he asked: "Are not you ashamed that the angels are walking on foot while you are riding on horses?" (*Sunan ibn Majah*)

This does not mean that the angels have feet like ours, and were literally walking on foot. The Prophet in fact wanted to stress the point in a symbolic way, that when a man has completed his term of trial, and is on his way to the Hereafter, it is a time for humility and modesty. In keeping with this spirit, it is only proper to walk on foot with the funeral. That is to say, it is a time for the humble servants of the Lord to walk on foot rather than indulge in the luxury of conveyance.

The simile in the hadith are all meant for illustration. They should be understood as figures of speech and not taken literally.

The Result of Reaction

Mr. G.D. Birla (1894-1983), besides being the topmost industrialist in the country, was also a very close associate of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle.

How the idea of national freedom took shape in the mind of Mr. Birla, is reproduced here in his own words: "When I was 16 years old, I started my independent business as a broker in Calcutta. During this period, I came in contact with many Englishmen, who were either my customers or my superior officers. I also saw their organisational capability and other qualities. But one thing I could not bear was their racial pride. I was not permitted to use the elevator to reach their offices. Neither was I allowed to sit on their benches, while waiting. This humiliation was very painful. As a result of this, I got interested in politics, which started in 1912 and continues till today."

The editor of *The Hindustan Times* (12 June, 1983) comments on this event: "This was the beginning of his nationalism." Mr. Birla's nationalism was inspired by intense feelings of dislike. Similarly the Islamism of the present-day Muslim leaders is born out of hatred for an opponent or enemy, whether real or imaginary. Both these sentiments are the results of reactionary forces, even though they speak in different languages. Neither of them could be termed a positive case.

To act on the strength of a positive incentive is one thing. But to be spurred on by a negative incentive is quite another thing. The former is 'action,' the latter 'reaction.' A satisfactory result can flow only from right action. Reaction being negative in itself, no positive result can be expected from it.